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Source: *British Journal of Ethnomusicology*, 1995, Vol. 4, Special Issue: Presented to Peter Cooke (1995), pp. 77-99

Published by: British Forum for Ethnomusicology

Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/3060684

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Ritual, religion and magic in West Mongolian (Oirad) heroic epic performance

Carole Pegg

This paper is based on the multiple voices of bards of different ethnic groups, visited during fieldwork in West Mongolia in 1989 and 1990. It looks briefly at the brutal demise of heroic epic performance under the Soviet regime (1921–90) and questions Vladimirtsov's contention that the steppe aristocracy was the creator, bearer, preserver and disseminator of Oirad epics. It suggests instead that epic performance was a ritual and magical activity within the homes of ordinary Mongolian herders as well as in monasteries. This paper presents for the first time the folk and shamanist beliefs and activities surrounding the performance of West Mongolian epics, as well as the power of the epic text, the musical instrument (*tovshuur*) and the bard. It looks at the religious syncretism within the texts—the object of bowdlerisation by the communists—and at worship of the epic hero as deity. Finally, it contributes to the oral and textual traditions debate by considering the ritual performance of epic texts.

I. INTRODUCTION: THE SOVIET ERA (1924–90)

The peoples of West Mongolia possess magnificent heroic epics (*tuul'*), which have been transmitted by a predominantly oral tradition. When I visited West Mongolia in 1989 and 1990, just prior to and during the year of the peaceful, democratic revolution, I found a few surviving bards from different Mongolian peoples (formerly "tribes"), who were able for the first time to acknowledge their ethnicities and talk of the old traditions, contexts and purposes of epic performance. There are more than twenty peoples in Mongolia, but during much of the communist period, they were not allowed to acknowledge themselves as such. During the 1960s, for instance, schoolchildren of different peoples were taught that they were Halh (the name of the largest Mongolian group). When the harsh Stalinist regime eradicated religion and created a "unified national socialist identity" from the many diverse peoples within Mongolia's borders, their performance traditions were eliminated or forcibly changed. Epic performance, which had survived the spread of lamaist Buddhism into Mongolia in the sixteenth century, was abruptly halted. The once highly-respected professional

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epic performers (*tuul'ch*) were reduced to living in holes in the ground (Byambadorj IN) and begging, and the texts of epics were stripped of any references to magic or religion (Tsoloo IN). Epics were collected in order to be bowdlerised and then promoted as evidence of a high form of "oral literature" of the people.[1]

Throughout the Soviet period, epic studies concentrated on a secular perspective, being concerned with linguistics and classification, on textual analysis rather than on performance. Epics became classified as "ancient literature", and poetical devices such as vowel harmony, formal parallelism and line-initial alliteration were analysed. A special "oral literary language"—with distinctive grammar, vocabulary and major archaisms—was identified as common in the epics of different West Mongolian ethnic groups (Vladimirtsov 1983–4:38; Rintchen[2] 1963). In line with communist ideology of a unified identity, versions collected from different Mongolian peoples were published as composite versions (see, for instance, Narantuya 1986). The fact that certain epics were particular to specific peoples (for example, the Altai Urianhai and Torguud Mongols have a completely different corpus of epics from the Bayad and Dörvöd Mongols) expressed a diversity of identities not suitable for the intended "unified socialist identity".

The Russian scholar, Boris Vladimirtsov, classified Mongolian epics into three types[3], according to their social origins: the Oirad[4] epic cycles expressed the spirit of the steppe aristocracy (ibid:27), Buryat epics reflected the simple life style of the taiga-dwelling herdsman-hunter and the Kalmyk Janggar epic cycle portrayed the complex nomadic life of an organised nomadic state (ibid:19). Vladimirtsov also claimed that the steppe aristocracy was the creator, bearer, preserver and disseminator of Oirad epics (ibid:7). My own fieldwork in West Mongolia caused me to question Vladimirtsov's claims. My suspicions were strengthened when I later read that the Russian Mongolist Burdukov noted in 1940 that the Oirad-Kalmyk heroic epics were created by the ordinary people and when I learned that

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[1] For a fuller discussion of the use of the performance arts by the communist regime as an ideological tool with which to create a "unified socialist identity" see this author's forthcoming book on Mongolian performance and culture (University of Washington Press).

[2] The name of the Mongolian Academician B. Rintchen is spelt with a "t" in accordance with his own preference (Bawden pers. comm.). However, the name is transliterated directly from the Mongolian cyrillic as "Rinchin" when referring to others who have the same name.

[3] His epic map was later modified by Rintchin, who proposed that a fourth centre should be added: the Halh area of central Mongolia (1966). The history of Halh heroic epics and their relationship to the changing Mongolian social structure has since been investigated by Poppe (1979) and there is an ongoing debate among Mongolian academics about whether the tales set to melodies (*üliger*) found among the Halh should be included within the category "epic". The Hungarian Mongolist, Kara, identified five epic traditions: the Halh, the Buryat, the Oirad, the Inner Mongolian, and the Monguor (1970:205–6). The Epic Symposium at Bonn, through the journal *Asiatische Forschungen*, has provided a forum for many years for the discussion of epic themes and motifs and for detailed textual analysis.

[4] This term is now used loosely to refer to a number of West Mongolian peoples, including the Bayad, Dörvöd, and Altai Urianhai whose epics are discussed in this paper.

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this was also the view of Byambadorj, Bayad Director of the Ulaangom Museum (1985:3). When I talked with epic bards, I realised that there were much deeper reasons for suppressing performance and elevating (bowdlerised) texts. As I shall show in this paper, performances, bards, instruments and texts were considered to have magical powers and were enshrined in ritual practices and beliefs.

It is not exactly clear whether epic performances ceased completely during the 1920s and 1930s, when there were massive purges and a sustained cultural offensive with dissemination of "national music" and "cultural enlightenment" by the military (Natsagdorj 1981:136–41), or whether, as with shamanism (Baljir IN) and folk religious practices (Tsedendambaa IN), performances continued in secret. Details of the bard Avirmed's career indicate that, by the 1950s at any rate, epic performances were possible, and, given that he began to train seriously in 1949 and became a full-fledged bard in 1959, suggest a loosening-up during this period. It was also during the 1950s that the Mongolian Committee of Sciences and Higher Education (later to become the Academy of Sciences), which was in charge of ideological aspects of culture, sent a research team comprising linguists, ethnographers and folklorists to western Mongolia to record the songs, epics, oral literature and dialects of the Torguud, Altai Urianhai, Dörvöd, Bayad, Zahchin, Myangad and Hoton groups of Bayan Ölgii, Hovd and Uvs provinces. Among its educational activities, this Committee supervised the composition of songs and legends, published volumes of doctored folklore and reprinted revised "ancient literature". It was not until 1982 that the fruits of this expedition were published (Tsoloo 1982, 1987). In that year, an official commission of the Central Committee of the Mongolian People's Republic issued a directive to say that the long-term objective of collecting, studying and disseminating traditional art should be implemented. The "traditional" art which was published was heavily doctored. It included composite versions of songs, epics with sections "enriched" (parts added), "corrected" (to fit with the prevailing ideology) or "omitted" (because of religious or magical content) and elements considered to be "progressive" were stressed.

During my research trips in 1989 and 1990, it was not possible to participate in an epic performance event. I spent a long time locating the bards, talking with them and recording extracts which they performed specially for me. This paper, then, is based on the experiences and memories of the bards, rather than my direct experience. Since it is based on the multiple voices of the bards I visited, I will begin by introducing these individuals.

II. MULTIPLE VOICES: CONTEMPORARY EPIC BARDS

A. Altai Urianhai: Avirmed

Avirmed is an Altai Urianhai who was born in 1936 in Mönhhairhan district (*sum*), Hovd province (*aimag*), and spent his childhood and early years there. In 1989, I visited Avirmed first at his shop in Hovd province centre, where he sold fire tongs, horse shoes, dried curds and a few other foodstuffs. It was a wooden

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building in a very dusty part of town close to a block of modern flats. Some of the houses in this area were very smart, with geraniums in the windows, and one or two felt tents in the yard surrounded by new wooden fences. Avirmed alternately swatted the many flies, rolled cigarettes from paper and served customers as he talked. Later, I visited his home—two felt tents (*ger*) in the yard belonging to the shop—where he performed for me in *hailah* style (see below) and explained many of the rituals surrounding epic performance in "Old Mongolia". Avirmed accompanies himself with a home-made, two-stringed lute (*tovshuur*) and has an extensive repertoire.

***Fig. 1:** Avirmed. Altai Urianhai, Hovd province, West Mongolia. 1989*

B. Zahchin: Enhbalsan

Enhbalsan lives in Manhan district, Hovd province. He is a Zahchin, which means "border person" and was the name given to guards of the state border (comprising different peoples) at the time of the Jungar State (1635–1758). He learned part of the Janggar epic cycle called "Lord Heaven Haan" (*Ezen Tenger Haan*), and everything he knew about epic performance, from the famous Zahchin performer, Bangar. Enhbalsan performs epics in *duulah* style, that is, he sings them as one would a song, with a melody and, in Enhbalsan's case, in a very sweet voice. I visited his family *ger* in 1989, and later he came to my room in the district centre.

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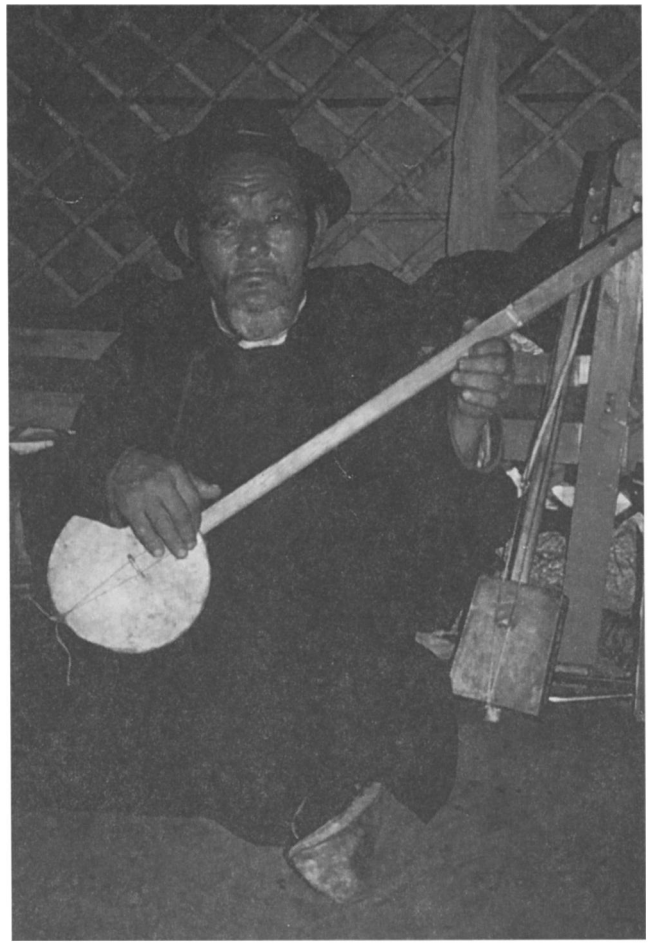
***Fig. 2:** Lhagva. Bayad, in his* ger, *Uvs province, West Mongolia. 1990.*



C. Bayad: Getsel, Lhagva, Düüdei

Getsel. I visited Getsel's *ger* (30.8.90) in Tes district, Uvs province, within sight of the border with Tuva. Getsel was out picking strawberries and Sea Buckthorn berries, a medicinal fruit found throughout Mongolia. When he returned, we drank herb tea and he performed sections of the epics "Geser Han" and "Janggar".

Lhagva. 72 year old Lhagva came originally from Züüngov' district, Uvs province, but his wife was from neighbouring Malchin district and it was there—in autumn pastures on the top of Mount Har Azarag—that I found him in September 1990. He nomadised four times each year and was on the point of moving to his winter camp, which was 22 kilometres away. His father, Rinchen, had been a famous bard in his homeland before he was liquidated in the 1930s, leaving six orphans. Lhagva had heard him perform the epics "Han Harangui",

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"Hevs Buidar" (which tells of the battles of a heroine), "Bum-Erdeni", "Janggar", "Dani-Hürel" and "Hüleg-Erdeni";[5] as well as performing legend-tales (*domog-üliger*) such as "Chingis-Haan" and "Amarsanaa". Lhagva performed for me sections from "Dani-Hürel" and "Hevs Buidar", accompanying himself on a *tovshuur* with a round body.

Düüdei. I interviewed this 85-year old blind lady in 1990 in Uliasny Hev, a winter settlement lying approximately 5 km east of Ulaangom. Her *ger* was within a small enclosure bounded by fences marked with traditional Mongolian designs of interlocking diamonds and circles.[6] She belonged to a family of seven generations of epic performers all of whom were ordinary herdsmen: her grandfather, Avuudai, was a famous Bayad epic performer, as was her father Chuluun and her eldest brother Hartsaga. Düüdei stressed that in "old" Mongolia there were no female epic performers. Sometimes, though, she had accompanied her father and she had also prepared food many times for those who gathered at her home to hear him perform. As a consequence, she had learned the three epics in his repertoire: "Son of God Bum Erdeni" (*Burhan Haany Hövün Bum-Erdeni*), "Best of Men Han Harangui" (*Eriin Sain Han Harangui*) and "Hüleg Baatar of Tusheet Haan" (*Tüsheet Haany Hüleg Baatar*).[7] Düüdei demonstrated part of "Han Harangui", accompanying herself on a rectangular-bodied *tovshuur*, typical of Bayad bards (and looking exactly like the West Mongolian, two-stringed, bowed spike fiddle, the *ihel*).

D. Dörvöd: Damia

Damia is a Dörvöd and the eldest son of Zonorov, born in Bayanzürh, Sagil' district, Uvs province, in 1930. He spent four years at school between 1940 and 1944 and then looked after sheep until he joined the production association (*negdel*) for which he worked for more than 30 years (Byambadorj 1990:21). I visited 60-year old Damia in Sagil' district after a "Festival of the Three Manly Sports" (*naadam*) held by the Dörvöd (8.9.90). Damia's parents died when he was a boy but he had heard his father performing tales (*üliger*) and epics and had copied him. His youth was spent during the early years of the Revolution and at that time almost no one dared to perform epics. He remembered only one other bard, Lhagvyn Havtai. Damia performed for me sections from the epics "Altai Hailah",[8] "Bum Erdeni" and "Geser Han", accompanying himself on an old Dörvöd *tovshuur*, which had a round body.

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[5] These titles are all the proper names of the epic heroes.

[6] These symbolised the earrings of a noblewoman (*hatan süih*) and the belt buckles of a *haan* (*haan buguivch*). These "feudal" symbols now also appear on silver rings exchanged upon marriage and were a sign of the reclamation of "tradition" which was underway.

[7] Tusheet Haan was one of the four Haans of Halh.

[8] Altai Hailah was first recorded and published in 1964 by B. Tserel and was republished in Mongolia later by Sh. Gaadamba and D. Tserensodnom (1978). Byambadorj suggests that a mistake was made with the title of this epic. "Altai Hailah" was the name used by the Bayad for the praise song which prefaced all epics, in the same way that the Altai Urianhai perform "Praise

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Prior to the communist era, there was a very active epic performance tradition in western Mongolia and, as indicated by the repertoires of the bards I visited, some epics were peculiar to certain peoples and some were widespread. For instance, the Kalmyk epic "Janggar" was performed by different Mongolian peoples in the early years of the communist revolution. The Bayad *bii*-dancer, Jam'yan, remembered how impressed he had been by his uncle Hartsaga's performance of Janggar, and the Dörvöd Jam'yan recalled the performances of two other bards, Türgen and Jamlin, commenting that the latter knew a rare part of the epic. Similarly, the Zahchin, Enhbalsan, remembered that when he was seven or eight years old, the bard Chadraa visited his *ger* and performed Janggar, accompanied by the spike fiddle (*ihel*). As recently as 1978 Tsoloo, as part of another expedition from the Institute of Language and Literature (*Hel Zohiolyn Hüreelen*) of the Academy of Sciences in Ulaanbaatar recorded a previously unknown chapter of Janggar (*Haan Sir*) from Magsaryn Pürevjal, a Torguud from the remote Bulgan district (*sum*) in Hovd province (Tsoloo 1982:27, 150–66).

Certain epics were disseminated among different Mongol peoples both within and outside of Mongolia's current borders. For instance, the Janggar epic cycle is found among Mongolian peoples in Xinjiang, People's Republic of China, and the Geser epic, believed to have originated in Tibet, was widespread among the Halh, Buryat, Oirad, and Mongols of Inner Mongolia, People's Republic of China.

Throughout my travels in Mongolia (1989, 1990, 1993), the Mongols continually distinguished between two periods of their history: "old" Mongolia and "new" Mongolia. By "old", they meant the period preceding 1921, when the Soviet Red Army marched on the capital of Mongolia (then called Urga) and the revolution began which resulted in "Outer Mongolia" becoming the Soviet Union's first political satellite (1924). Under the communist regime, the essence of "old" Mongolia was transformed during a cultural engineering process which aimed to create a "national" socialist identity for people and society. "New" and "progressive" became ideologically sound concepts and anything "old" was valued negatively.

Let us turn, then, to contexts of performance in "old" Mongolia as described to me by epic bards in West Mongolia.

III. CONTEXTS OF PERFORMANCE IN "OLD" MONGOLIA

A. Ritual and magic in the herders' homes: folk and shamanist beliefs

My fieldwork indicates that the most usual context of performance in "old" Mongolia was within the homes of ordinary herders and that epic performance was primarily a ritual and magical activity. Among the Oirad, epic performance was used both to please and to exorcise spirits, to cure illness and infertility, and

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Song to the Altai Mountains" (*Altain Magtaal*). Byambadorj suspects that Tserel misunderstood when first noting down the epic.

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bring success in hunting or war. Epic performers were sometimes kept as official bards by the local aristocracy, as in the case of the Bayad Parchin Taiji, who performed frequently in the camps of the Bayad and Dörvöd princes (Vladmimirtsov 1983:33), but this was rare and viewed as an "obligation". As the 85-year old blind Düüdei explained, ordinary herders like her father Chuluun performed for the local aristocracy because they had no choice in the matter. No "invitation" was offered, she said, since epic performers—like musicians, singers and dancers—were considered to *belong* to the prince and therefore were *obliged* to perform. Similarly, performance in monasteries was subsidiary to the usual performance context of the herders' tent (*ger*) where—because of the potency of epic performance—it was surrounded by elaborate ritual procedures. In pre-Soviet Mongolia, the performance, the epic, the musical instrument and the bards were all believed to have magical powers.

a. The power of performance

In "old" Mongolia, it was thought that the act of performance could please the shamanist spirits of nature (*baigaliin ongod*) and also ritually exorcise evil spirits (*chötgör*) and demons (*zetger*) (Avirmed IN). Epic performance was considered especially important when settling into a winter place. The benevolence of the ancestral spirits would guard against a harsh winter or a sudden bad fall of snow (*zud*), which might kill men and animals (Bayad Jam'yan IN). Similarly epics were performed before a hunting expedition, since it was believed that if pleased, the spirits of nature would "give" game to the hunters (Enhbalsan IN). When the performance had been particularly well executed, there would be no chase: the animal would simply wait for the hunters. In cases of infertility or illness in people or animals, epic performance was used for exorcising rather than pleasing spirits (Avirmed IN).

The timing of performances was believed to be important. They were always held at night and could last from three whole nights to a week but only during certain seasons of the year. The Altai Urianhai thought that performances during summer months would antagonize the spirits, causing storms with strong winds, rain and lightening. So they were held between the end of October and the end of March and, when the ground became soft, performances ceased (Aviirmed IN). By contrast, the Bayad believed that this only applied to certain epics. For example, Düüdei's father, Chuluun, performed "Bum Erdeni" and "Hüleg Baatar of Tüsheet Haan" (*Tüsheet Haany Hüleg Baatar*) in summer but he did not dare to perform the third epic in his repertoire, "Han Harangui", which calls the son of Heaven into battle and was thought to be particularly dangerous.

Altai Urianhai Avirmed explained that, knowing of the impending performance, everyone in the area would converge on the host's *ger* and be given good food, as at a feast (*nair*). The bard's meal was different from that of his audience. He consumed saltless black tea and ate lean meat on the bone, rather than the salty tea and fatty mutton prized by Mongols. He sat in the respected area in the north of the tent (*hoimor*) and the others present sat in descending hierarchical order according to age and sex. At about ten o'clock in the evening,

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the host presented the bard with a ceremonial scarf and asked him to begin. Before the epic, a prelude was performed by the epic performer .[9] For instance, among the Altai Urianhai this was "Praise song to the Altai Mountains" (*Altain Magtaal*) and among the Bayad and Dörvöd, *Altai Hailah*:

With eternal white mountain peaks	*Mönh tsasan ehtei*
With smooth stony peaks	*Mölgör chuluun orgiltoi*
Hugely vast, majestically tall	*Örgön tümen, hüder öndör*
My rich kingly Altai homeland.	*Bayan han Altai nutag min' gev gene ee.*

Both praise in great detail the Altai's fresh, flowing spring water, the valleys and ravines, the different trees and plants, the five kinds of domestic animals, and man's relationship with nature. The number thirteen is used, almost in a magical sense: there are thirteen black dense forests of the Altai, thirteen white snow-capped mountains, thirteen white passes and so on (Tsoloo 1987:15–17).

When the bard began this praise song, the host had to burn incense and juniper in a ritual of purification and make libations of milk to the gods (Avirmed IN). Offerings made before an epic performance were believed to be more potent than those made at other times. After this praise song, the bard rested before beginning the epic. It was thought to be imperative that the audience, including the children, should remain attentive throughout the performance to support the struggle of the good forces against the evil ones. Amongst the Dörvöd, children were warned that falling asleep would be a sign of support for the epic's evil forces and, more seriously, they would actually become the souls or spirits (*süns*) of enemy soldiers. Onions were put on their eyelids to help them to stay awake (Damia IN). During the performance, it was forbidden to drink vodka (*arhi*), which the Mongols distilled from mare's milk, and silence must prevail (Avirmed IN). Once the epic was begun, it could not be left unfinished: the evil forces must be vanquished by the good before the audience could go home (Avirmed IN).

The vocal tone used for the production of epics was termed *hailah*[10] and was significant in that it was a mark of reverence, respect and esteem (Erdeni IN). Women were allowed to "tell" epics but on no account could they use *hailah*. Avirmed showed great concern that this technique was no longer being used by modern performers. The production of this deep, declamatory style is, he said, related to overtone singing (*höömii*) and the playing of the three-holed, vertical flute, the *tsuur*. [11] Avirmed explained that all of these used a forceful flow of air from deep in the chest, required great strength and were performed only by men.

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[9] This contrasts with the performance of Buryat epics before which the audience sang in chorus an invocatory song to the *üligerch*.

[10] This term has been discussed by Horloo (1985:4), who described it as "to narrate in melody" (*hailah ni ayaluulan heleh gesen utgatai*) and by Bawden who distinguished it from the term *hüürneh*, also used to describe a mode of epic delivery. Bawden (1979:40–1) concluded that *hüürneh* referred to the recitation of an epic in prose form without poetic rhythm and that *hailah* referred to recitation in verse form, with or without musical accompaniment.

[11] The same relationship was suggested by Byambadorj, Director of Ulaangom Museum.

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The Kalmyk epic cycle Janggar too was performed in a ritual setting by ordinary herders with the bard assigned a place of honour within the *ger*. Such was the bard Ovla's reverence for the heroes about whom he sang, that he performed the whole of the Janggar epic in a kneeling position (Bormanshinov 1982:164).

b. Efficacy of the text

Amongst the Altai Urianhai, Bayad and Dörvöd, specific epics were believed to be efficacious for particular problems,[12] and the bard, therefore, had to be able to perform the appropriate epic (Avirmed IN). In addition to the fact that many magical incantations and religious formulae were enshrined within the text, the theme of an epic had specific relevance. Avirmed remembered how, among the Urianhai, "Rich White Old Man" (*Bayan Tsagaan Övgön*)[13] was performed to bring prosperity; "Snow White Old Man" (*Argil*[14] *Tsagaan Övgön*)—in which the main character is a horse—was performed to increase the fertility of herds; "Naran Gerel Haan"[15] (*Haan Naran Gerel*)—in which the hero finds in the forest a baby boy fallen from Heaven—was performed for infertile couples; and the two epics "Black Boar of the Steppe" (*Talyn Har Bodon*) and "Prince Bujin Davaa" (*Bujin Davaa Haan*) were requested to exorcise evil spirits which were believed to be causing illness. Similarly, the Bayad Jam'yan recalled how "Han Harangui" had been performed by his uncle Chuluun many times before setting up the family's winter camp in order to exorcise evil spirits from the place. Epics were also performed to gain the good will of spirits. For instance, as amongst the Buryat, epics were performed by the Altai Urianhai prior to hunting so that they might be "given" game by the local mountain spirits. And Vladimirtsov noted that the Bayad Parchin performed "Bum-Erdeni" in 1912 when the Mongol troops besieged Hovd as part of the war for independence from China (1983–4:36).[16]

The Altai Urianhai believed that the text must be correct and complete and that nothing must be changed, added or missed out by the performer, otherwise it would be dangerous for the lives of both listeners and performer. Avirmed's grandfather, Jilker, told how the spirits and the heroes of the epics assisted his memory by sending him dreams of the epic's action. To alter the epic was thought

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[12] This was also the case amongst the Buryat, where specific epics were performed, for instance, before hunting or to invoke rain (Shoolbraid 1975:20–21).

[13] The "White Old Man" was part of the Mongolian folk religious pantheon, although he was later incorporated into Buddhism. He was lord of the local place (*nutug*) and represented general wellbeing.

[14] *Argil* was used amongst the Urianhai as an intensifier (Tsoloo IN) but can also mean "rich in worldly experience or wisdom" or "big of stature" (Hangin 1986:30)

[15] J. Tsoloo recorded *Naran Haan Hü* and *Bayan Tsagaan Övgön* from the Altai Urianhai Choisüren in 1966.

[16] In Nov 1911 the Halh princes and church hierarchs had proclaimed the kingship of the Urga Hutuhtu, told the Chinese authorities to leave and cancelled all indebtedness to Chinese firms. The Manchu governor (*amban*) in Hovd refused to leave his garrison, and there was a combined siege by eastern and western Mongolian units led by Dambijantsan (Adelman 1971:xix).

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to be a great sin for which one could be punished by the spirits or by the heroes themselves. For this reason, the Bayad Düüdei, daughter of the famous bard Chuluun, was particularly anxious when she saw a published version of Parchin's version of "Bum Erdeni" which contained major differences in plot from her father's version. For instance, in Parchin's version[17] Bum Erdeni and Huiten Höh Zev became brothers. But Düüdei described in detail how, in her father's version, he and Hachir Har killed Huiten Höh Zev. The Buryat Mongols also believed that mistakes would be followed by some form of punishment and that the epic hero was present at each performance checking the "truth" of it (Shoolbraid 1975:24). Similarly, the Kalmyk Mongol performers of Janggar (*Janggarchi*) believed that mistakes in performance could cause sudden whirlwinds (Bormanishov 1982:167). It is interesting to note that a version of *Altai Hailah* recorded in 1986 by Gaadamba and Tserensodnom from the Dörvöd bard Damia had almost no textual differences from the original which had been recorded from him twenty years ealier (Tserel 1964).

c. Conveying the lute (tovshuur)

Altai Urianhai Avirmed explained how the two-stringed lute or *tovshuur* was kept in a place of honour within the bard's tent and was only allowed to be touched by him. On the day before the performance, the host carried this instrument, in a special box, to his home. This process was referred to as "conveying the *tovshuur*" (*tovshuur zalah*) and its presence within the *ger* was thought to be able to push away or elude danger.

According to Avirmed, the instrument had to be constructed following strict rules. The lower part of the body was made from juniper wood and fashioned in the shape of a *tsatsal*: a wooden ladle used for the ritual sprinkling of milk. The face of the body was made from the skin of a camel calf (in its first year)[18] and on it nine holes were prodded with a large needle, symbolising the holes on the *tsatsal* ladle. The hair for the two strings had to be taken from the tail of the owner's favourite and fastest horse: the string closest to the player being made from nine horse-hairs twisted clockwise, and the one furthest away, from seven horse-hairs twisted anti-clockwise. They were tuned to an interval of a fourth. On the top end or head of the instrument was tied the "Ceremonial Silk Scarf of Succession" (*Ulamjlalyn Hadag*), which was inherited by a bard and symbolised the transmission of the art of epic performance to the generation below (Davaasüren 1992).

Among the Bayad, Dörvod and Hoton, the bodies of the *tovshuur* varied in shape. Some had oval scoop-shaped bodies, like the Urianhai ones, some had round bodies, shaped like a cup or bowl (*ayagan tovshuur*) and some were

[17] See Zagdsüren 1972 for Parchin's version and Narantuya 1988 for a summary of that version's plot.

[18] Byambadorj noted that although in recent times the bodies of both the *tovshuur* and the *ihel* are covered with sheep, goat, camel calf, and camel skin, in the old times people used the stomach, bladder, ventricles of ruminants, and mare's udder, and did not like covering their instruments with goat or camel skin (1985).

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***Fig. 3:** Altai Urianhai bard. Seser, Hovd province, West Mongolia. 1989.*

rectangular. In the early years of the century, round and oval-shaped *tovshuur* were played by the Bayad "strong black Jushlai", the Dörvöd Ulaansai and the Hoton Sevhüüd. Rectangular ones were played by Parchin, Avudai, Chuluun, Hartsaga and Zundui, all of whom were Bayad. The strings of the *tovshuur* used by these three ethnic groups were made from the intestines of sheep or goat which, after being cleared and washed several times with water were then stretched and twisted clockwise and anti-clockwise and dried (Byambadorj 1985:3–4).

A version of the myth of origin of the *tovshuur*, which is widespread in West Mongolia and recounted to me by the Zahchin, Enhbalsan, explains the use of the *tovshuur* as instrumental accompaniment to epic performance and the necessity to please the mountain and animal spirits prior to hunting. It went as follows:

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Two hunters went to the mountain. They were very hungry because they had been unable to kill anything and had had nothing to eat for three days. One of these hunters had magical powers and was able to see things that people normally could not; the other was just a poor man and a performer of "Praise Song of the Altai Mountains" (*Altain Magtaal*). The diviner asked his companion to sing a praise song to the Altai, to the masters of the mountains and the waters, saying that they would then give them animals for food. So he began to perform and as he did so many animal-masters gathered and sat all over him, even on his face. Only the diviner could see this. They sat so closely that only the tip of his nose was left free. Then a small old, old woman arrived and tried to sit on the tip of his nose but, because there was not enough room, she fell onto his top lip. The performer did not feel it but it slightly interrupted the flow of his song. Only the diviner saw it and he smiled suddenly. Seeing him smile, his companion became very cross and said "Why are you smiling? I think you are making fun of me!" and, despite the diviner's attempts to persuade him to continue, stopped the performance for the Altai. All the tiny animal-masters of the Altai had been very interested in the song and so began to scold the old woman, saying "Tomorrow we'll give your ibex[19] to these men." The diviner heard their conversation and said to his companion "OK, don't get angry. Let's go to bed to rest and perhaps tomorrow we'll find some food."

The next day they woke early, had morning tea and set off. When they came to the first hillock they saw an ibex and quickly killed it. The magician then told his companion of the strange happenings of the previous night and why he had laughed. He offered to make an instrument to accompany his praise-song so that it would help to guard against the recurrence of such happenings. The man made an instrument using horse-hair for the strings and sculpted a likeness of the head of the animal just killed at the end of the neck. Such was the origin of the *tovshuur*.[20]

Prompted by this myth of origin, Enhbalsan had carved the head of an ibex on the top end of his home-made *tovshuur*.

d. The bard as healer and fortune-teller

Bards were thought to be magicians, healers, and fortune-tellers. Bards not only explained the origin of the universe and helped the herders to understand their own customs and traditions, they controlled magical forces and were able to see into the future. Lhagva, for instance, gave as an example a bard who foretold the arrival of communism by including in his epic the lines:

The time has come when Buddha's head	*Burhny tolgoi manad dunad hiij*
will be confused and smoke will rise	*Utaa manarah tsag bolloo*
from the mouth of the holy vessel.	*Bumbyn amnaas.*

Lhagva also interpreted the copper insects and iron crickets referred to in epics as a prediction of the invention of cars and aeroplanes and warned that other

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[19] The ibex (var. *Capra sibirica typica*) is a large, wild, long-horned mountain goat found over the whole area from Siberia to the Tian Shan (Carruthers 1913:630).

[20] Dulam (1987:42) recounts a slightly different version of the same myth.

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predictions included the onset of a great Islamic war, which would destroy the earth by wind.

Many of the rituals surrounding epic performance indicated the great respect accorded to the performers in pre-Soviet Mongolia. For instance, the potential host would go to the bard's home, present him with a long ceremonial silk scarf (*hadag*) and request a performance. Having agreed, the bard would choose an auspicious day and the host would then send a horse to transport him at the appointed time. The performer was believed to have secret or mystical knowledge and upon his arrival would instruct the removal of anything which might detract from the efficacy of the performance. Because of his accredited powers and the belief that his performance was inspired by supernatural forces, the bard was never treated as a hired performer—although afterwards he would be given gifts, sometimes of great value, such as a fully equipped horse.

In addition to mystical knowledge, the importance of accuracy of rendition necessitated that the bards underwent a long training period, followed by a stiff examination before receiving social acceptance in the role. The oral epic tradition is believed by the bards to have continued unbroken for many centuries, and the skills of performance have been transmitted primarily by males within families. Avirmed's own experience will serve to illustrate the transmission and training process.

At least seven generations of Avirmed's lineage (*udam*) are known to have been epic performers (Damdinsüren 1985:51). In the early years of this century, Vladimirtsov met Avirmed's maternal grandfather, Jilker (1858–1935) and reported that Jilker's father and grandfather were bards (Tsoloo 1987:9). Avirmed's father, Baatar, performed as did his father's elder brother Buyan and his uncles, Shirendev and Rinchen. Buyan learned epics from Jilker,[21] later passing them on to another relative, Choisüren, and to Avirmed (ibid). Avirmed's elder brother Urtnasan now also performs, but he learned his epics later in life. Women rarely performed epics and when they did so it was only in intimate gatherings. But they often knew them because of the frequency with which they had heard them, and they sometimes assisted in the learning process. For example, it was Avirmed's mother, Orolmaa, who first helped him to learn epics by correcting his mistakes and instilling into him the need for accuracy.[22]

Avirmed began learning seriously at the age of 13 years, although he had heard epics consistently prior to that because of his family tradition. Included in his grandfather Jilker's repertoire were the epics "Rich White Old Man" (*Bayan Tsagaan Övgön*), "Snow White Old Man" (*Argil Tsagaan Övgön*) and "The Boy Naran Han" (*Naran Han Hövgüün*), all of which are now performed by Avirmed. Avirmed's father, Baatar, died when he was two years old but Avirmed listened a lot to his mother's brother, Rinchen. Both Rinchen and Jilker's pupil, Choisüren, sang "Praise Song to the Altai Mountains" (*Altain Magtaal*), which is also in

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[21] For instance, "Hetsüü Berh" (Tsoloo 1982:110–150), "Zul Aldar Haan" and "Uyan Möngön Hadaasan" (Tsoloo 1987:387–510).

[22] Orolmaa performed "Jargal ihtei ezen ulaan bodon" and "Önchin yargai" (Davaasüren 1992).

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Avirmed's current repertoire. Avirmed's main teacher, however, was his paternal uncle, Shirendev, from whom he learned "Black Boar of the Steppe" (*Talyn Har Bodon*), "The Boy Naran Han" (*Naran Han Hövgüün*) and "*Bujin Davaa Haan*". Avirmed accompanied Shirendev when he was invited to perform, assisting him by looking after his horses and preparing his meals. He was introduced to the art of performance by substituting for Shirendev when he needed a rest. On the first occasion, Avirmed was very afraid because of the potentially dire consequences which he believed would result if he made a mistake. After training for ten years, Avirmed had to undergo an examination by a panel of "judges" consisting of Choisüren, Jilker and Shirendev during which he had to prove accuracy of rendition. It lasted for two whole nights but he was successful and only then, with public recognition of his status as a *tuul'ch*, was he able to receive invitations to perform.

The ceremonial silk scarf of succession (*ulamjlalyn hadag*), which must be tied to the head of the *tovshuur* as a symbol of the continuation of the art, was passed from Jilker to Avirmed's father's elder brother, Rinchen and then to Avirmed. In post-Soviet Mongolia, Avirmed now feels a pressing need to find someone to whom he can transmit it and is therefore teaching epics to his son Dorjlalan, his nephew Oldoh and his younger brother Seser. But he is aware that accuracy of rendition is only one of the requirements necessary to become a *tuul'ch*. An understanding is also required of the ritual and magical elements of performance, and the role of the bard as healer and fortune teller, as described above.

B. Patronage of epic traditions by monasteries and lamas

In some Mongolian areas, such as eastern Buryatia, bards were persecuted by Buddhist sects which considered epics as ideological weapons of the rival faith, shamanism. In West Mongolia, though, lamas protected and patronised epics by inviting bards to the monasteries to perform. Sometimes the lamas themselves even performed. For example, the Dörvöd bard Namilan, born in 1911 in Türgen district, Uvs province, joined the monastery of Tögsbuyant when he was ten years old. While there he learned "Praise to the Altai", "Geser", "Han Harangui" and other epics from his lama-teacher, who performed them to other lamas, clergy and apprentices within the monastery. Similarly, the famous Dörvöd bard Tsagaandan Zodov, born in 1910, learned many epics, tales and legends from lamas in the same monastery, where he stayed from the age of six until he was twenty-six (Byambadorj 1990:19). Vladimirtsov (1983–4:33) described how, when Parchin was about fourteen years old, he studied at a Bayad monastery in the Hovd district and while there he had heard the bard Sesren perform the epic "Bum Erdeni". Parchin learned this epic from him and later, when he performed it for Sesren, he was given a ceremonial *hadag*, signifying that he had inherited both the epic and the right to be a bard.

However, the experience of the Dörvöd bard Hainzan suggests that there was also tension in the roles of lama and bard. Born in 1915 on the border of the former Ulaan Jindmeni of Prince Zorigt's banner, Dörvöd Dalai Han province (now Ulaangom town, Uvs province), Hainzan was the sixth son of Gölög and

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consequently, as was often the practice with the youngest son, was given to Pe-je-lin monastery at the age of eight years. There he studied Mongolian script and then worked as a clerk for his teacher–lama. Byambadorj, the Director of Ulaangom Museum explained: "The boy did not want to become a lama because he was interested in the epics, legends, folktales, blessings and praise songs which his father used to perform during long winter nights...and it was always his dream to become a bard." He left the monastery when he was sixteen and although he did not perform epics or play the *tovshuur* until after his father died in 1935, he had assimilated them and in 1940 was able to record them for a visiting research team (Byambadorj 1990:14).

In both Tibet and Mongolia, Lamaism appropriated much of the shamanist and folk religions which had preceded it. For instance, the "White Old Man" became incorporated into Buddhist mythology and rituals. The active encouragement of the performance of epics by lamas in western Mongolia gave rise to legends that some of them were reincarnations of epic heroes. For example, Dani-Hürel, hero of the lengthy Bayad and Dörvöd epic cycle, was said to have been reborn in the Bayad monastery of Pe-je-lin, where he held the grade of "bagshi-gegen"[23] (ibid: 28). Similarly, epic heroes became identified as Buddhist gods, while retaining many of their shamanist abilities and characteristics. But in many cases, local people continued to worship and revere the heroes as their own shamanist or folk gods, who were believed to affect the everyday lives of the performers and audiences.

IV. RELIGIOUS SYNCRETISM IN EPIC TEXTS

West Mongolian epics are tales which fuse folk, shaman and Buddhist beliefs. They are in essence magical, telling of desperate struggles between the forces of good, personified by a hero and very occasionally a heroine, and the forces of evil in the shape of many-headed monsters, devils and demons. By undergoing magical transformations and assisted by a good friend or a horse (with the power of human language), the hero defeats these evil forces. He wins over any rivals by competing with them in the "Three Manly Games" of horse-racing, archery and wrestling. During his struggles the hero may die—but he will always come back to life again, for the epic performance can only end when he has vanquished all the black forces arraigned against him (Avirmed IN). One of the most powerful Mongolian epics is believed to be "Han Harangui", because the hero engages in battle and defeats the Son of Heaven. This epic is deeply rooted in shamanist beliefs. The balance of folk, shaman and Buddhist influences in epic texts varies according to the ethnicity of the group and expresses itself in different ways.

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[23] Mo. *bagshi* —learned lama (Lessing 1982:70). Mo. *gegen, gegegen* —a term of address for incarnate lamas usually translated as "Serene Holiness" (ibid:374).

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A. Shaman and Buddhist universes

Altai Urianhai epics have a more marked shamanist content than other Oirad epics. They are very long, archaic, and are the only type which begin with an account of the origin of the earth and the creation of people. Although the action is nominally set in the Altai and the Hangai mountains, the universe in which the drama unfolds is essentially shamanist, being divided into the watery Underworld (*Luu*), Earth (*Gazar*) and Heaven (*Tenger*). For example, in perhaps the most famous Altai Urianhai epic, the 21-chapter *Zul Aldar Haan* (Tsoloo 1987:389–510),[24] the origin of the universe is described in the following way:

Long ago	*Ert ur'd*
At the beginning of time	*Ehen türüün tsagt*
When the foreign ocean	*Gadaad dalai*
Was forming, mud and marsh,	*Balchig öröm togtoj*
And sandalwood trees were	*Galbar zandan modon*
A young thicket	*Naigag jiree baiha*
A navel appeared in the universe	*Orchlond hüis bolood*
Formed by pressing down its ribs	*Süveegee daraad*
By blocking its shadow	*Süüdree böglööd togtson*
In the place of Zamba Tiv	*Oron Zamba Tivd*
It grew like a pillar	*Bagana bolood urgasan*
Up from the middle of the plain	*Tal dunduuraas n' ööd*
Pitch black mist	*Tas har budan tatsan*
Tall, shrouded in mist	*Budantai öndör*
The black mountain peak,	*Har uul haruustai baidag*
Zul Aldar Haan	*Zul Aldar Haan.*

This passage is clearly archaic and refers to a pre-Buddhist universe where *Zul Aldar Haan* and the mountain are fused as one and where his body/the mountain forms the link between the three shamanic levels of the universe. *Zul Aldar Haan*'s navel is the centre of the universe, on the earthly or middle level, so that by implication his body reaches both above and below it. His head, the peak of the mountain shrouded in mist, reaches up to Heaven, and the lower part of his body is out of sight in the Underworld. In Buddhist philosophy, the Sanskrit-derived term *Zamba Tiv* (*Jambu Dvīpa*), used here to describe the location of the event, referred initially to India and later to the world generally, but in Mongolian legend refers to "Middle Tiv" (*Dund Tiv*), that is the area lying between the Underworld (*Dood Tiv*) and Heaven (*Deed Tiv*) (Dulam 1989). Sandalwood is associated with Buddhism and *Galbar* is probably *Galbaravars*, the Mongolian Buddhist term meaning a mythological wish-granting tree (Lessing 1982:1170).

The Mongolian scholar Tsoloo (IN) suggested that these three levels are also symbolised in the titles of Altai Urianhai epics. For instance, the wild boar (*bodon*) is said to symbolise the watery underworld because the belief is that the souls or spirits of the dead go into the boar's head, which it frequently puts into

[24] Performed by Buyan, teacher of Choisüren, and by Avirmed's grandfather, Jilker.

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water. The boar features in several titles, for instance, "Black Boar of the Steppes" (*Talyn Har Bodon*) and "Lord Red Boar" (*Ezen Ulaan Bodon*). The "White Old Man" appears in the titles of two Altai Urianhai epics, that is "Rich White Old Man" (*Bayan Tsagaan Övgön*) and "Snow White Old Man" (*Argil Tsagaan Övgön*) and, according to Tsoloo, symbolises humanity. And, although the Haans are depicted in human form, they usually are sent by Heaven and therefore symbolise the sky or high places, thought to be the home of gods. Altai Urianhai epics feature inhabitants from all three levels of the shamanist universe who communicate in different ways. The levels are sometimes linked by a golden ladder but communication is also made in other ways. For instance, a person on the ground might make contact with the underground through snakes, which form a protection against water enemies and consequently frequently appear on shaman costumes (Tsoloo IN).

B. The soul outside the body

One aspect of the shamanist doctrine of the multiplicity of souls is that one of a person's souls may exist outside of the body. For example, the shaman's soul can safely leave his or her body, penetrate the Underworld and rise to the sky in search of the patient's fugitive soul, which may have strayed away or been stolen. In order to heal the ill person, the shaman must find the soul, capture it and return it to the body (Éliade 1964:182). Another belief is that the "life" of an individual resides in a mountain, a tree or an inanimate object, the deterioration or destruction of which brings illness or death to the being whose life is attached to it. This latter belief occurred in part of the epic "Bum Erdeni" performed for me by the Bayad Düüdei. In order to kill this enemy, Huiten Höh Zev, the hero first had to destroy his soul which was located outside of Zev's body. "Bum Erdeni" had returned home to find that Huiten Höh Zev had occupied his homeland and captured his parents. He and his friend Hachir Har asked Bum Erdeni's horse where the soul of Huiten Höh Zev might be found and the horse replied:

> Beyond the Horon Yellow Sea are five golden aspen and inside these trees are five black insects. If you two kill these insects you will defeat Huiten Höh Zev but if you don't your strong bones will dry in the wind and your black blood will seep into the sand.

So the two heroes went to the place, felled the trees with their spears and set fire to the black insects inside them. But the insects became copper and tried to escape and Bum Erdeni and Hachir Har caused iron rain to fall which killed the copper insects. Then going to Zev they pierced him three times in the side of the chest, three times in the heart and three times in the bladder. Although Huiten Höh Zev tried to enlist the help of the daughters of the sun, the moon and the gods of the earth and waters, he failed. Because his soul had been destroyed, it was easy to defeat him.

A further aspect of this doctrine, as expressed in epics, is that the external "soul" or "life" need not be singular. For example, in a Tibetan version of the Geser epic, after the hero took possession of the treasure of Magyalpumra, to

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assist him in his mission to defeat the King of the North Country, the enemy "loosed a black wind, which darkened the sky and fell as a waterspout upon the Ling encampment, knocking down in the temple-tent three sacred bows, one of which had the 'life' of the people attached to it" (David-Neel 1934:135–6).

C. The folk, shaman and Buddhist hero or god

Epics which had previously contained indigenous folk and shamanist ideology and incorporated blessings (*yeröөl*), curses (*haraal*) and praise songs (*magtaal*), became highly syncretistic under the influence of Buddhism. The Dörvöd bard Zodov told a legend, learned from his mother's brother after leaving Tögsbuyant monastery in the 1930s, which couched the origin of four epics in both Buddhist and shamanist terms. The legend described how the Lord of the upper world (*deed tengeriin ezen*) foresaw danger in the middle and lower worlds and therefore sent his four sons with iron navels to the four different sides of Mount Sümber to destroy the evil and save all living beings on the earth. Mount Sümber refers to Mount Sumeru which, in Indian Buddhist mythology, is the centre of the cosmos surrounded by four major "continents" (*tiv*) with their eight sub-continents (Byambadorj 1990:19–20). The heroes of four epics—Bum Erdeni, Haan Saihan Mehlee, Ezen Bogd Tsagaan and Dani-Hürel—were sent to rule the four major "continents" of the universe.

The epic "Geser Han" is perhaps the most striking example of the syncretic capability of the epic hero. In the Tibetan version of the epic, Geser is depicted as a Buddhist hero whose purpose is to defend the faith against non-believers. But shamanist beliefs and practices impregnate much of the text, and the founder of shamanist Bönpo religion, Guru Shenrabs, is invoked with reverence in the course of many of the songs (David-Neel 1934:10). Moreover, Tibetan bards had much in common with shamans in that they performed in a state of trance, wore special headgear, used a bamboo baton, and claimed to be possessed by "the god of the epic" (Stein 1959:335).

In Mongolian versions, Geser is also a syncretic hero but is sent to earth by his father, Hormusda, the ruler of the heavenly beings (*tengri*), to free the earth from evil rather than to defend Buddhism. Geser is incarnated in human form from the union of god and a water spirit, and is aided in his task of defeating many monsters by 35 heroes.[25] In order to achieve peace and happiness, however, he has to employ magical means such as transforming himself into animate and inanimate forms: the Garuda bird, lamas, trees, rocks and so on (Sagaster 1977:300). The cosmology draws on a mixture of religious ideas. For instance, Hormusda refers to the Hindu god, Indra, and the Garuda is a magical bird of Indian mythology, but the *tengri* and Geser's transformations are shamanist in origin.

It is a fine line between epic heroes sent by gods and epic heroes who are themselves believed to be gods. For instance, the Altai Urianhai believed that their epic heroes were the Seven Star Gods (*Doloon Burhan Od*). Similarly, it was

[25] The number fluctuates between 30 and 35 according to the version.

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widely believed among Mongols that Geser was one of the equestrian deities of the Mongolian folk religion—a protective deity of warriors and herds, who was also believed to bestow good luck in hunting. Numerous Mongolian prayers refer to Geser, his supporting heroes, the 360 warriors of his vanguard, and to events found in the epic. "Temples of Geser" proliferated in Mongolia during the nineteenth century (Pozdneyev 1971 [1896]), and there is still a "Temple of Geser" in Ulaanbaatar, just below the terrace of Gandan Monastery (Bawden, pers. comm).

D. The ritual performance of texts

Although predominantly an oral art form, epics appear as written texts and the relationship between the oral and written traditions has been the subject of much debate. Few written epics have been found in West Mongolia, but there is evidence to show that such manuscripts were sometimes kept by princes and in monasteries (Zagdsüren 1972:14). That epics passed back and forth between written and oral traditions is clear from the example of the epic "Han Harangui". When Parchin became bard at the court of Prince Da Beise, he learned his version of this epic from a manuscript copy there (Vladimirtsov 1983–4:34). An interesting addition to this debate, which arose from my fieldwork in West Mongolia, is the issue of the ritual *performance* of texts, indicating a quite different type of interaction of the oral and written epic traditions. The Bayad bard Getsel, for instance, performed orally for me part of a chapter from the "Geser Han" epic and a little of "Janggar". Although he is illiterate, he had memorised the epics from the "readings" from manuscripts of other bards. Such "readings", he said, were treated with great respect. Similarly, Jam'yan, a teacher of the Oirad script, *tod*, recalled how the performance of Geser both by textual and oral rendition was very popular amongst the Dörvöd. His father had a manuscript version of Geser in *tod* and it was this which had inspired Jam'yan to learn the Oirad script. As with other epics, Geser was only performed at night and during the winter months, and "readings" were surrounded by ritual and treated with the same respect as oral performances (Jam'yan IN). Furthermore, the German Mongolist Heissig (1980:101) noted that among the east Mongols, parts of the "Geser Han" epic were recited by lamaist monks when illness threatened the herds; and that the text was always kept in a horizontal position in a "pure" place, in order not to anger the hero. "Geser Han" continued to be worshipped by these people until the 1930s, and "Geser Han" family temples survived until 1945 (ibid).

V. CONCLUSION

This paper has looked at epics from the perspective of performance, showing for the first time how—in context and content—West Mongolian epics in pre-Soviet Mongolia were enshrined in religious and ritual beliefs. It would not be surprising, then, if traditional contexts of performance had to cease or "go underground" during the communist era. Certainly, the texts which were

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published in Mongolia as "ancient literature" were bowdlerised beyond recognition. Versions of West Mongolian epics were first doctored to remove any traces of folk, shaman or lamaist beliefs, and amalgamated to prevent ethnic differentiation. Moreover, new tales were created in line with the new ideology. For instance, Yundendorj of Overhangai province composed an epic depicting the deeds of the partisans of the 1921 revolution. It is to the credit of the Institute of Language and Literature, Mongolian Academy of Sciences, that a wonderful archive exists containing recordings of many West Mongolian epics and information on famous epic performers, including the Dörvöds Baglai, Namilan, Hainzan, Zodov, Bataa and Damia; the Bayads Sesren, Parchin, Tsedev, Hartsaga, Chuluun and Pürev; the Altai Urianhais Buyan, Choisüren and Avirmed; and the Torguud Pürevjal. Only now is it possible to publish undoctored versions of these great works within Mongolia. When I was in Mongolia in 1993, there was much discussion about impending epic performances, such as had been usual in "old" Mongolia, but it is not clear whether any have yet taken place.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to gratefully acknowledge financial support received from the Economic and Social Research Council (Grant No. 13936), the Leverhulme Foundation, the British Academy, the Mongolian Academy of Sciences and the Owen Lattimore Trust. I also wish to thank academics and colleagues who have supported my work: Dr Caroline Humphrey, Mongolia & Inner Asia Studies Unit, University of Cambridge; Emeritus Professor Charles Bawden, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London; Dr Laurence Picken, Jesus College, University of Cambridge; and Dr Yondon, Director of the Institute of Language & Literature, Mongolian Academy of Sciences, Ulaanbaatar. Especially, I thank D. Tserenpil, linguist with the Institute of Language & Literature, Mongolian Academy of Sciences, for his valuable help as interpreter, guide and friend, and the many Mongolian friends who took me into their homes during my research work in Mongolia.

INTERVIEWS (IN)

Avirmed, 1989. Altai Urianhai epic performer, in his home (*ger*) in Hovd town centre, Hovd province, West Mongolia.

Baljir, 1993. Darhad shamaness. In her *ger* in Hövsgöl province, north-west Mongolia.

Byambadorj, 1990. In the museum in Ulaangom, Uvs province, West Mongolia.

Damia, 1990. Dörvöd epic performer, in his *ger* in Sagil" district, Uvs province, West Mongolia.

Düüdei, 1990. Bayad epic performer, in her *ger* in Uliasny Hev, the winter settlement about 5 km east of Ulaangom, Uvs province.

Enhbalsan, 1989. Zahchin epic performer, in his tent (*ger*) in Manhan district centre, Hovd province, western Mongolia.

Erdeni. 1991. In the home of the author in Cambridge, UK.

Getsel, 1990. Bayad epic performer, in his *ger* in Tes district, Uvs province, close to the Tuvan border.

Jam'yan, 1990. Bayad *bii*-dancer in his *ger* in the summer camp close to Ulaangom, Uvs province.

Jam'yan, 1990. Dörvöd, in the Harhiraa Hotel, Ulaangom, Uvs province.

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Lhagva, 1990. Bayad epic performer in his *ger* on top of a mountain in Manham district, Uvs province.

Tsedendambaa, 1993. Myangad. In his *ger* on Altan Höhii mountain, Hovd province, West Mongolia.

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